

Infant Baptism. When—Where—Why.

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In writing the history of "Infant Baptism," I will first ask you to listen to the declarations of six representative men of the six great bodies who practice infant sprinkling.

I. Roman Catholic. Archbishop Hughes of New York, wrote in his "Doctrinal Catechism," "it does not appear from Scripture, that one infant was ever baptized; therefore Protestants should reject, on their own principles, infant baptism as an unscriptural usage."

Second, Episcopalian. The late Bishop of Salisbury, England, wrote these words, "I most candidly and broadly state my conviction, that there is not one passage, nor one word in Scripture, which directly proves it. (Infant baptism) not one word, the undeniable and logical power of which can be adduced to prove in any way of fact, that in the Scripture age infants were baptized, or of the doctrine that they ought to be baptized."

Third, Lutheran. Martin Luther, the solitary monk who shook the world, says, "It cannot be proved by the Sacred Scriptures, that infant baptism was instituted by Christ."

Fourth, Presbyterian. Dr. Philip Schaff says, "There is the absence of precept or example for infant baptism in the New Testament, and the apostolic origin of infant baptism is denied, not only by the Baptists, but also by many pedo-Baptist divines."

Fifth, Congregationalist. Dr. Leonard Woods says, "Whatever may have been the precept of Christ or of his apostles, to those who enjoyed their personal instructions, it is plain that there is no express precept respecting infant baptism in our sacred writings. The proof, then, that infant baptism is a divine institution, must be made out in another way."

Sixth, Methodist Episcopal. Dr. A. T. Bledsoe says, "With all our searching we have been unable to find in the New Testament a single express declaration or word in favor of infant baptism."

As the Presbyterians are the last to depart from their traditions received from the fathers, I would like to add one more voice to the preceding six, which is that of their great founder, John Calvin. He says, "It is nowhere expressed by the Evangelists that any one infant was baptized."

If infant sprinkling is not in the New Testament, and the greatest scholars of past ages, and all of the present age, say it is not there, how did it come to pass that it became a substitute for the baptism that is there? That question I will now proceed to answer. When, where, and why was sprinkling used as a substitute for immersion? The learned Curcellæus says, "The custom of baptizing infants did not begin before the third age after Christ was born. In the former ages no trace of it appears. . . . It was introduced without the command of Christ, and therefore this rite (infant baptism) is observed by us as an ancient custom but not as an apostolic tradition."

That prince of exegesis, Dr. H. A. W. Meyer, says, "The baptism of the children of Christians, of which no trace is found in the New Testament, is not to be held as an apostolic ordinance, as indeed it encountered early and long resistance; but it is an institution of the church which gradually arose after the apostles' times, in connection with the development of ecclesiastical life, and of doctrinal teaching, not certainly attested before Tertullian, (Tertullian died between 220-240) and by him decidedly opposed."

Dr. Augustus Neander, than whom no greater historian has yet written on the early history of Christianity, says in his Church History, "Baptism, at first, was administered only to adults as men were accustomed to conceive baptism and faith as strictly connected. There does not appear to be any reason for deriving infant baptism from an apostolic institution; and the recognition of it, which followed somewhat later, as an apostolic tradition, serves to confirm this hypothesis."

Those who are called the apostolic fathers, and who wrote in the first century, were five in number. Their names are Barnabas, Hermas, Clemens, Romanus, Ignatius, and Polycarp. Of all these only the epistle of Clemens Romanus can be relied on as genuine. He says, "They are right subjects of baptism who have passed through an examination and instruction," and "the baptized ought to be children in malice, but not in understanding; even such children who, as the children of God, have put off the old man with the garment of wickedness, and have put on the new man." If any man can find helpless infants there, he must put them there. In all the writings of the first century, not one word can be found that recognizes the existence of infant baptism in the first hundred years of Christianity. For the learned Martin Luther, who was no great friend of the Baptists, was bound to acknowledge that, "It cannot be proved by the sacred Scripture, that infant baptism was instituted by Christ, or begun by the first Christians after the apostles."

Who is the pedo-Baptist that will be so bold as to say he can find a distinct declaration that helpless infants were baptized in the second century? The principal

Christian writers of that century were Justin Martyr, Athenagoras, Theophilus of Antioch, Tatian, Minucius Felix, Irenæus, and Clement of Alexandria. And in all their writings there is only one man's that pedo-Baptists care to appeal to, in which they think they can see infant baptism. Justin Martyr lived about A. D. 140 or 150, and here is one passage he wrote which pedo-Baptists like so much. "As many as are persuaded and do believe that those things which are taught and spoken by us are true, and engaged to live accordingly, are instructed to pray . . . and are then led to a place where there is water. . . . Instead of commenting on that extract myself, I quote what a German theologian of Halle, Dr. Johann Semler, says. "From Justin Martyr's description of baptism, we learn that it was administered only to adults. He says we were (corporally) born without our will . . . but in baptism are to have choice knowledge, etc. This we learned from the apostles." From Semler's "Life and times of Justin Martyr," we read "whenever Justin Martyr refers to baptism, adults appear as the objects to whom the sacred rite is administered. Of infant baptism he knows nothing. The traces of it, which some persons believe they have detected in his writings are groundless fancies, artificially produced." Here is another passage from Justin Martyr, in which pedo-Baptists think they see infant baptism. "Several persons among us of 60 or 70 years old . . . disciples to Christ from their childhood, continue uncorrupted." Observe "childhood," not from infancy I have baptized some children, who if they remain steadfast in the faith till they are 60 or 70. It will be said of them that they "were disciples to Christ from childhood."

Can we find infant baptism in the third century? Here is the fairest statement that can be made out from history up to Tertullian's day. The idea that baptism was essential to salvation, having obtained currency, Quintilla, a wealthy lady, wrote to Tertullian, suggesting that if her offspring asked for baptism they ought to have it,—a suggestion plainly implying that at the time she wrote "child baptism" did not prevail. Here is the first proposal on record that it should be introduced. What was Tertullian's reply? "Those who administer baptism know very well that it is not to be rashly given." Quintilla had quoted the passage "give to him that asketh." And Tertullian rejoins; "Give to him that asketh," every one hath a right to it, as a thing of alms; nay say rather; "Give not that which is holy to the dogs; cast not your pearls before swine; lay hands suddenly on no man; be not partaker of other men's sins." As the lady had reminded him of Jesus' words, "Suffer little children to come unto me," he answers; "Why is it necessary that sponsors as well should be brought into peril, who themselves by death may abandon their promises, or be deceived by a growth of a corrupt disposition? The Lord indeed says, do not hinder them from coming to me. Let them come when they are of ripe years, let them come when they understand, when they are taught whether they are coming, let them be made Christians when they know Christ."

Pedo-Baptists are welcome to all the encouragement they can get from the first of the Latin fathers, Tertullian. Origen who lived in this century, has been appealed to by pedo-Baptists as favoring infant baptism; but it must be remembered that we have nothing of his writings to refer to. He died about A. D. 254, and we have nothing to refer to but translations of his writings made nearly 200 years after his death, by a monk named Rufinus who lived in the fifth century. And this monk of Aquilines is candid enough to acknowledge that the translation may be considered as much his own as Origen's. In this view agree four great pedo-Baptist historians; Dupin, Erasmus, Wall and Neander.

During this century there were few crimes of which Africans were not guilty. Church affairs became so disorderly, and the fiery trials of Christians were so fierce, that not a few lapsed into heathenism. The pious, in order to rescue children from the murderous practices of the heathens, were in the habit of purchasing them, thus saving their lives and importing them into Christian localities. The children thus rescued could not partake of the charitable gifts of the church without baptism.

Cyprian, Bishop of Carthage, was written to by Fidus, an African Prelate—and apparently infant-life-preserver in Africa—who having no precedent to guide him, requested to know how soon babies might be baptized?

Here is a clue to the introduction of infant baptism. This was about 40 or 50 years after Tertullian's reply to that wealthy lady Quintilla. What did Cyprian reply to Fidus? Had Cyprian any precedent to guide him in answering to Fidus? No. So he called a council of 66 bishops to deliberate and decide when a babe might be baptized. And what do you think these men did? They decided that a babe might be baptized as soon as it could be kissed. Behold this Cyprian, who was a scholar at the feet of Tertullian,—and who had declared with Tertullian and Origen, that in apostolic days none were baptized but those who obeyed Christ,—Cyprian the man who originated prelate,—who we are told, dealt in wonders not only foolish but gross,—who talked of angelic visions and extraordinary legends, who wrote a long essay on the discovery of John the Baptist's head,

who worked on the public mind, almost magically by means of relics,—this Cyprian, who spoke of the Lord's Supper as a charm,—("with priestly notions filtered into his mind from heathen resources" From "Apostle to Priest" by J. W. Falconer. This was the "lordly Christian" who presided over the council at Carthage, whose members he himself acknowledged, instead of being examples to the flock, "were covetous, fraudulent, and usurious" This was the man who formulated the decision and reasons for its promulgation. Here is the mint where this base coin was struck off, and on it you see his head, and around it "Cyprian,—pedo-Baptist the first, Carthage, A. D. 253."

Now note the reasons that council gave for the decree they sent forth. "That the grace of God is denied to none; that as Jesus came not to destroy men's lives, but to save them, we ought to do everything in our power to save our fellow men. That God is not a respecter of age more than of persons, and that his grace is equal to all; that the prophet Elijah lay upon a child, and put his mouth on his mouth, and his eyes on his eyes, and his hands on his hands, that the spiritual sense of this is that infants are equal to men, but that if you refuse to baptize them, you destroy this equality and are partial; inasmuch as baptism is a washing away of the sin of human nature, the sooner it is performed the better, lest any should die unbaptized, and so perish."

From that declaration, it is clear that its authors believed that baptism was a saving ordinance, so that infant baptism was really an outgrowth of "baptismal regeneration." And that is the only reason those 66 bishops give for baptizing infants. Observe that they make no appeal to the New Testament; they produce not one solitary passage from the gospels or epistles; they point us to not one precept, command or example to support their monstrous and impudent mandate. But setting aside the revealed will of God, the plain commands of Christ, and the practices of the Apostles; they of their own free will, set up an institution, which has been associated with the darkest errors, from the day of its origin until now.

The sign of the cross was an early superstition among ancient Christians; whatever they were doing—dressing, putting on their shoes, sitting down to meals, wherever they were going, to a feast, or a bath, or to bed, or if from home they returned, they used the sign of the cross. Of course at the baptism of an infant, it was had in requisition. The infant was sometimes immersed thrice, had put into its little mouth milk and honey, and was not only anointed with holy oil, but had actually administered to it the elements of the "Lord's Supper." Before pedo-baptism appeared—or around it when it did appear—the doctrines of baptismal regeneration—of purgatory, of prayers for the dead—of consecration of baptismal water—and the use of sponsors—as well as a whole host of the most absurd and silly mummeries—all found standing ground.

Let me remind you that, the baptism of infants authorized by Cyprian's council, was not "infant sprinkling," but "infant immersion," as it is in the Greek church (Russia), to day. It was only in cases of severe sickness and approaching death that "sprinkling" was substituted for "baptism" and to show that "sprinkling" even in such emergencies was not regarded as an equivalent to "baptism," I here quote from a work by two great pedo-Baptists, Drs. Storr and Fatt—"Biblical Theology," Article Baptism. "Immersion was so customary in the ancient church, that even in the third century the baptism of the sick, who were merely sprinkled with water, was entirely neglected by some, and by others was thought inferior to the baptism of those who were in health, and who received baptism not merely by aspersion, but who actually bathed themselves in water." This is evident from Cyprian (Epistle 69, ed. Bræmæ, p. 185, etc.) and Eusebius (Hist. Eccles., L. VI, cap 43), where we find the following extract from the letter of the Roman bishop Cornelius; "Novatus received baptism on the sick bed by aspersion, if it can be said that such a person receive baptism," no person who had during sickness, been baptized by aspersion, was admitted into the clerical office."

The celebrated "Encyclopedia of religious knowledge," (compiled by Drs. Schaff and Herzog two of the most scholarly pedo-Baptists) gives us the following.

Article Baptism. "In the primitive church, baptism was by immersion, except in the case of the sick (clinic baptism) who were baptized by pouring or sprinkling. These latter were often regarded as not properly baptized, either because they had not completed their catechumenate or the symbolism of the rite was not fully observed, or because of the small amount of water necessarily used. (The twelfth canon of the Council of Neocaesars; (314-315) 16; "Whoever has received clinic baptism, through his own fault, can not become a priest, because he professed his faith under pressure (fear of death) and not from deliberate choice, unless he greatly excel afterward in zeal and faith, or there is deficiency of other eligible men." Hefele, Conciliengeschichte, Vol. I., Sec. 17, first edition.)

In A. D. 816, the Council of Calcuth (Chelsea, London, Eng.) forbade the priests to pour water upon the infant's heads, but ordered to immerse them. Hefele, Vol. IV., Sec. 414.

The Council of Nemours (1284), limited sprinkling to cases of necessity. And Thomas Aquinas (Summa Theologica, III., Q. 66, Art 7, De Baptismo) says: "Although it may be safer to baptize by immersion, yet pouring and sprinkling are also allowable." The Council of Ravenna (1311), was the first to allow a choice between sprinkling and immersion (eleventh canon, Hefele, Vol. VI., Sec. 699); but, at an earlier date (1287), the canons of the Council of the Liege Bishop John, prescribe the way in which the sprinkling of children should be performed. The practice first came into common use at the end of the thirteenth century, and was favored by the growing rarity of adult baptism. It is the present practice of the Roman church; but in the Greek church immersion is insisted on as essential. Luther sided with the immersionists, described the baptismal act, as an act